Author draws on his prophecy of a pandemic to stress the need for global governance

Ian Goldin, professor of globalization and development at Oxford University. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Oxford professor praises China's leadership role

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Ian Goldin believes pandemics pose a risk to the world that is 1,000 times greater than wars.

The professor of globalization and development at Oxford University also said they serve to demonstrate how interdependent the world has become.

"We can only combat this and other global threats, like climate change and antibiotic resistance, by coming together," he said.

"We have to build a cooperative, harmonious world, where we realize that we are only as strong as the weakest among us."

A former economic adviser to late South African president Nelson Mandela, Goldin predicted in his 2014 book *The Butterfly Defect: How Globalization Creates Systemic Risks, and What to Do About It* that the next economic crisis would come from a pandemic.

"This disaster has been waiting to happen for a long time. It was merely a question of where and when it would start. China was one possible source, but it could have equally started in many, many other hundreds of thousands of cities around the world," he said.

Goldin predicted the likely cause of a pandemic would be animal-to-human transmission, possibly by eating the meat of exotic wild animals, and then a virus being spread through global travel.

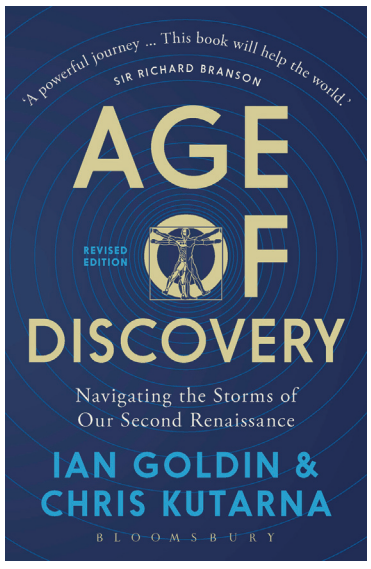
"It's inevitable that these viruses will not only arise more frequently in animal-to-human transmission. With the combination of airport hubs and people flying around the world — a symbol of globalization — the spread of contagion was bound to be more rapid," he said.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has posed a huge test for the global community, but the response so far has been less coordinated than that to the global financial crisis of 2007-08, he added.

"It needn't have been worse, but it is. China has acted quickly, but the problem is the rest of the world. The United States has been extremely erratic. The statements coming from the White House have been alarmingly unfocused, and blaming foreigners is hardly helpful.

"After the financial crisis, then-US president George W. Bush called an emergency meeting of key heads of state and made a point of including China. Then, as part of a coordinated global plan, China put in more money than the rest of the world together in a massive fiscal stimulus."

Goldin, a regular visitor to China, said the world's second-largest economy has demonstrated leadership and a willingness to help other countries.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"No country has done anything at the speed and on the scale that China has done. It has also mobilized medical supplies and personnel to Italy. We need to find a vaccine, and that means a global effort," he said.

The crisis comes at a time when some in the West, in particular, are turning their backs on globalization, he added.

"Global governance is totally unfit for 21st-century purpose and not least for fighting this pandemic. This thing is developing, not least within the Southern Hemisphere in places like Africa. These countries are going to need massive support. We are not seeing any of that," he said.

According to Goldin, the problem with globalization as a concept is that everyone has a different perspective of it, depending on where they are located.

"The view of globalization from Europe and from the US is very different to the view from Beijing, Jakarta or Mumbai," he said.

However, he insisted that it has been the driving force behind the advancement of technology and civilization.

"Globalization has been the greatest force in human history to bring progress, deliver jobs, provide incomes, foster technology — including the production of vaccines, whether against smallpox, measles or polio," he said.

"It is responsible for the flow of ideas, finance, trade and people. China has been an immense beneficiary of globalization, as has Asia as whole."

However, Goldin said that since the global financial crisis there has been a failure in the West to manage globalization.

"The experts and the authorities got it wrong. Some people got richer and others lost their jobs, so you see these big inequalities emerging. This is what has produced the politics we are now seeing. The rise of populism and nationalism in Europe and the US reflects the anger about this. It has been an absolute failure of the elite to manage globalization," he said.

Goldin fears there is a danger of the world becoming even more divided in its attitude to globalization.

"Asia will probably continue to see globalization as broadly a good thing, and as a source of continued growth and opportunity. There will be much more nervousness in the West. We could see more populism and nationalism, and that would be very, very bad."

He said it could be dangerous for the world to push back from globalization just as global problems, including the current pandemic, need global solutions.

"There is no wall high enough that is going to keep out climate change, antibiotic resistance, or the next financial crisis or next pandemic. The idea that you can insulate yourself and have a wealthy, prosperous society as an island in a world which is systemically in crisis is a complete fantasy," he said.

Goldin added that there is also a tendency in the West to see globalization in terms of merely outsourcing manufacturing, when it is a much more all-encompassing concept.

"One major example of globalization is Chinese tourism. It has grown at the most remarkable rate of between 6 and 10 percent a year for the past 10 years. As people's incomes rise, along with the interest Chinese people have about the rest of the world, that will continue," he said.

As for the current pandemic, he said there are stark warnings from history, which he highlighted in his book *Age of Discovery: Navigating the Storms of Our Second Renaissance*. The book was published in 2017 and has been translated into Chinese.

"The Renaissance (the transition in Europe from the Middle Ages to modernity in the 15th and 16th centuries) ended in disaster because it wasn't managed properly. The ships that went to America spread disease that killed most Native Americans The politics was handled badly, which led to religious wars and inquisitions," he said.

Goldin believes the world must learn some fundamental lessons from the current pandemic.

"We cannot be complacent ever again. We have to understand this is a rising risk. It is hard to believe right now, but it could be worse in the future. When we get through this, we need to stop the next pandemic.

"It will not be done by the US, Europe or China acting alone. It requires a new way of thinking that prioritizes global governance and the interests of both people and our planet. It is the common future of humanity that is at stake," he said.